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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005241

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [AG](#) [MO](#) [TS](#) [LY](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA UPDATE ON MAGHREB ISSUES

REF: A. ALGIERS 1402

[1](#)B. PARIS 4560

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During a meeting with visiting NEA/MAG Acting Director William Jordan, MFA DAS-equivalent for the Maghreb Christian Testot reported continued difficulties with the Algerian government over a February 2005 French law lauding achievements from the French colonial period, with Algerian press criticism targeting French FM Douste-Blazy for sponsoring similar legislation in his former MP role. Strains over the issue could complicate a Douste-Blazy visit to Algiers in August, and undermine prospects for concluding the landmark French-Algerian friendship treaty sought by the GoF this year. Testot bemoaned the downward spiral in Moroccan-Algerian relations, blaming both sides in part, but questioned the motivations of the Bouteflika government to a greater degree. Testot agreed with Jordan on human rights setbacks in Tunisia, but did not suggest a shift in the GoF approach to the issue. On Libya, Testot acknowledged complications in implementation of the compensation agreement for the UTA 772 bombing, and described the normalization process with France as incremental. End summary.

#### STRAINS IN ALGERIAN-FRENCH RELATIONS

[1](#)2. (C) Visiting NEA/MAG Acting Director William Jordan met with MFA DAS-equivalent for the Maghreb Christian Testot July 25, for a tour d'horizon on Maghreb issues. Starting with Algeria, Testot observed that relations between Paris and Algiers were going through a "bizarre" phase, with the GOA continuing its public criticisms of the French colonial period, in a delayed response to a February 2005 French law which welcomed the positive French role in its former overseas territories (refs a-b). Testot surmised that Algerians continued to view colonialism as the source of all Algeria's problems. A further complicating factor was that new French FM Douste-Blazy, in his former role as a member of parliament, had sponsored French legislation similar to that which sparked the current controversy. (Note: Douste-Blazy is from the Toulouse region, home to a sizable minority of "pied noirs," former French settlers expelled from Algeria upon independence. End note.) Testot observed that articles critical of Douste-Blazy were appearing on a daily basis in the Algerian press, and that the GoF had yet to secure Algerian MFA agreement to the dates for a proposed Douste-Blazy visit to Algiers in late August. Testot stressed that GoF wanted to avoid escalation of the controversy and had urged French parliamentarians not to react to statements coming from Algiers. Both sides needed to find the right words to describe their colonial history, with the issue being a sensitive one in France, not just Algeria. In the meantime, the GoF remained focused on concluding of a landmark Franco-Algerian friendship treaty this year, which would take bilateral relations to a new level. Despite Morocco's special relationship with Paris, he opined, Algeria represented the most important potential strategic partner for France in the Maghreb. The GoF was beginning to wonder, however, whether Bouteflika might be having second thoughts about concluding the Friendship Treaty this year.

#### PESSIMISM ON MOROCCAN-ALGERIAN RELATIONS

[1](#)3. (C) Testot reaffirmed shared GoF-USG concern on the downward spiral in Moroccan-Algerian relations, and described the GOA as regressing a bit into 1970's ideologies, while the GOM tended to overreact in a maladroit fashion to statements coming out of Algiers. Testot attributed GOA's hardening stance in part to Algeria's comfortable economic position, with its sizable gas reserves, and the sweeping Bouteflika election victory in 2004. He also speculated that that Bouteflika could be showing a tougher stance towards Morocco and stirring up the colonialism issue in order to deflect criticism from other policies, such as a possible amnesty for former participants in Algeria's civil war. Testot voiced pessimism on prospects for improving ties between Rabat and Algiers, noting that FM Douste-Blazy had provoked a negative reaction in both capitals for linking Moroccan-Algerian direct dialogue to resolution of the Western Sahara conflict. He added that the recent "5 5" ministerial meeting in Malta did nothing to clear the air, as Morocco did not send a

ministerial representative (due to FM Benaissa having to accompany PM Jettou to Madrid). Testot agreed with Jordan that the GoF and U.S. needed to find ways to encourage direct dialogue between the two countries, but current prospects looked grim, with the Western Sahara issue at "point zero."

#### TUNISIA HUMAN RIGHTS

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14. (C) Testot largely concurred with the U.S. assessment of the human rights situation in Tunisia, and described Tunisian civil society as "under siege," with no breathing room. The GoF had hoped that Tunisia's hosting the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) would be preceded by some relaxation of GoT controls on the press and civil society, but no such opening was occurring. Testot commented on the irony of a government welcoming hundreds of journalists and information society experts, while continuing to restrict internet access. He added that the GoF had not decided who would lead its delegation to the WSIS, but speculated that it would be either President Chirac, PM de Villepin or FM Douste-Blazy. Asked about French NGO reactions to Tunisia's hosting the WSIS, Testot reported that a number of groups, like Reporters without Borders, were happy to attend, and planned to take large delegations so they could cause trouble for the GoT. As for GoF messages to the GoT, Testot stressed that France continued to privately advise the GoT that reform was in its interest; the typical GoT response, according to Testot, was to raise the Islamist threat and insist that the current system is working well.

#### LIBYA

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15. (C) Briefly on Libya, Testot confirmed that the compensation agreement for the UTA 772 bombing, which should be paid in full by early 2006, was not fully resolved; complications continued to come from the Libyan side, with the Qadhafi Foundation backing out of some of the terms of the accord (NFI). Testot concluded that it was difficult to deal with the Libyan government, as every interlocutor said something different and the state functioned in a bizarre fashion. The GoF was attempting to normalize relations on a step by step basis, but Libya remained an outsider in the Maghreb and appeared disconnected from concrete issues in the region.

16. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

STAPLETON